

Message Text

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION - PANAMA CANAL

FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM AN EDITORIAL IN THE AUGUST 26
TORONTO GLOBE AND MAIL ENTITLED "HIGH NOON ON THE PANAMA
CANAL":

"THE DISMANTLING OF AN EMPIRE IS ALWAYS PAINFUL." AFTER
DISCUSSING ALGERIA, THE SUEZ CANAL AND VARIOUS AFRICAN
COLONIAL WARS, THE PAPER OBSERVED THAT "AMERICANS COULD
WATCH ALL THIS THRASHING AROUND IN MORAL COMFORT, SNUG IN
THE ANTI-IMPERIAL TRADITIONS OF THEIR FOUNDING FATHERS.
BUT THEY ARE NOW DOING SOME THRASHING AROUND OF THEIR OWN.
AFTER 13 YEARS OF NEGOTIATIONS, WASHINGTON AND PANAMA ARE
NOW IN PRECARIOUSLY TENTATIVE AGREEMENT ON A PLAN TO
TRANSFER CONTROL OF THE PANAMA CANAL TO LOCAL HANDS BY THE
YEAR 2000. AND PRESIDENT JIMMY CARTER FACES A FIGHT TO GET
THE DEAL THROUGH THE SENATE WITHOUT TWISTING IT BEYOND
PANAMA'S RECOGNITION.

"THE NEGOTIATIONS, NOW ENDING, WERE SET IN TRAIN IN 1964
BY BLOODY RIOTING THAT STARTED WHEN AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL
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STUDENTS, IN DEFIANCE OF CONCILIATORY AMERICAN GOVERNMENT
POLICY, HOISTED THE AMERICAN FLAG AT THEIR CANAL ZONE
SCHOOL.

"TO SOME SECTORS OF CONSERVATIVE AMERICAN OPINION, HOWEVER,
ALL TALK OF WITHDRAWAL AMOUNTS TO A BETRAYAL. THIS
ATTITUDE, WHICH HAD SEEMED DORMANT SINCE THE MID 1960S,
FLARED UP AGAIN AS A BACKLASH, AFTER THE FACT, AGAINST

THE LIQUIDATION OF THE AMERICAN PRESENCE IN INDOCHINA. IT IS NOW IN DANGER OF BEING GIVEN A BOOST IN VOLTAGE BY THE CURRENT TALKS ABOUT ENDING THE AMERICAN SECURITY AGREEMENT WITH TAIWAN. SENATOR BARRY GOLDWATER, FOR EXAMPLE, HAD BEEN PREPARED TO GO ALONG WITH A PANAMA SETTLEMENT. BUT HE IS DEAD AGAINST ANY EASING AWAY FROM TAIWAN. HE MAY FIND IT HARD TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO USE THE PANAMA DEBATE AS A BARGAINING CHIP.

" 'CONTRARY TO THE BELIEF OF MANY AMERICANS,' SAYS ELLSWORTH BUNKER, WHO HAS BEEN THE CHIEF AMERICAN NEGOTIATOR, 'THE UNITED STATES DID NOT PURCHASE THE CANAL ZONE FOR 10 MILLION DOLLARS IN 1903. RATHER THE MONEY WE GAVE PANAMA THEN WAS IN RETURN FOR THE RIGHTS WHICH PANAMA GRANTED US BY TREATY. WE BOUGHT LOUISIANA; WE BOUGHT ALASKA. IN PANAMA WE BOUGHT NOT TERRITORY, BUT RIGHTS. IT IS CLEAR THAT UNDER THE LAW WE DO NOT HAVE SOVERIGNTY IN PANAMA'.

" THE QUESTION, HOWEVER, IS WHETHER THAT WILL BE CLEAR TO THE UNITED STATES SENATE, IN WHICH 31 OF THE SIGNERS OF THE 1975 THURMOND RESOLUTION STILL SIT AND FORM THE FRONT LINE OF RESISTANCE TO THE DRAFT TREATY. THEY HAVE TWO BIG STICKS TO WIELD. ONE IS THE CLAUSE IN THE 1903 TREATY ASSURING AMERICAN RIGHTS 'IN PERPETUITY'. THE OTHER IS A CLAUSE IN THE NEW DRAFT TREATY PROVIDING THAT THE CANAL IS TO BE, IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, NEUTRAL, AND OPEN TO THE SHIPPING OF ALL NATIONS.

"PRESIDENT CARTER EVIDENTLY TAKES SERIOUSLY THE DANGER OF UNCLASSIFIED

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A CAMPAIGN, LED BY RETIRED ADMIRALS AND GENERALS, TO PAINT THE WITHDRAWAL AS A THREAT TO AMERICAN SECURITY. FOR HE HAS ATTEMPTED TO PRE-EMPT THE MILITARY HIGH GROUND IN THE ARGUMENT BY HAVING THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF GIVE THE TREATY A THUMPING ENDORSEMENT.

"THE MATTER OF 'PERPETUITY' COULD PROVE POLITICALLY TICKLISH. IT WAS THIS PROVISION OF THE ORIGINAL TREATY THAT MOST RANKLED THE PANAMANIAN. AND IT IS ALSO THE BEST AMMUNITION AVAILABLE TO THOSE AMERICANS WHO WANT TO ATTACK THE WITHDRAWAL AS A SURRENDER. IN FACT, WASHINGTON HAS WORKED INTO THE NEW ARRANGEMENT A MODEST LITTLE CLAIM IN PERPETUITY TO KEEP THE CANAL 'NEUTRAL' IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS WITH, IN MR CARTER'S WORDS, 'NO CONSTRAINTS ON THE ACTION THAT WE CAN TAKE AS A NATION TO GUARANTEE THAT NEUTRALITY'. BUT, IF MR CARTER LEANS HEAVILY ON THIS IN PUBLIC, AS HE STARTED TO DO AT THIS WEEK'S PRESS CONFERENCE, THAT WILL BE POLITICALLY TROUBLESOME FOR GENERAL TORRIJOS. MILITANT PANAMANIAN NATIONALISTS ALREADY SEE THE DRAFT TREATY AS A SELL-OUT.

"EMPIRES DIE HARD."

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